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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001834

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [BA](#) [POL](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS NO. 4: CAMPAIGN VANDALISM,
MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES REGISTER

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Acts of vandalism marred the election campaign during a week when Bahrainis were celebrating the Eid Al Fitr holiday. Vandals burned down the campaign tent of second deputy speaker and Al Asala (Salafi) candidate Shaikh Adel Al Ma'awada on October 22. In separate events, hooligans wrecked independent candidate Fawzia Zainal's campaign tent, damaging display boards and breaking lights on October 24, and pulled down a large billboard displaying her campaign picture and slogan on October 25. Newspaper columnists condemned the actions. The period of registration for municipal election candidates concluded October 24 with a total of 171 candidates competing, including five women. The Bahrain Transparency Society will present a voluntary code of conduct to all election candidates on October 26 and encourage them to sign and conduct their campaigns within the ethical guidelines spelled out in the document. End summary.

12. (SBU) CAMPAIGN VANDALISM: In an act of campaign sabotage that is new to Bahrain, the campaign tent of Shaikh Adel Al Ma'awada, Council of Representatives second deputy speaker running for reelection in Muharraq, was burned down in the early morning hours of October 22. Al Ma'awada dismissed speculation that one of his four competitors might be responsible and accused "ignorant people" of committing the act. Then on the first day of Eid Al Fitr celebrations on October 24, an attempt to damage the campaign tent of Northern Governorate MP Shaikh Mohamed Khalid (Al Minbar political society--Muslim Brotherhood) was foiled when one of Khalid's campaign security spotted two young men carrying bottles, allegedly filled with kerosene, attempting to sneak into the tent. The two men fled the area when discovered but were not apprehended.

13. (SBU) Also on October 24, unidentified individuals vandalized the campaign tent of prominent Central Governorate independent female candidate Fawzia Zainal, head of programming at Bahrain Radio and Television Corporation, breaking lights, tearing down posters, and defacing display boards. Zainal released a statement saying that the delinquents must have been aware of the watchman's schedule since the damage took place in a short period during which he was away from the tent. "This is a very cowardly act that does not reflect the good nature of the Bahraini people or the ethics that have always guided us." In a second act of vandalism against Zainal on October 25, vandals brought down a large billboard displaying her campaign photo and slogan. It appears that the billboard's foundation bolts were removed and it was then pulled down by a vehicle. One Arabic daily reported that there were crane tracks in the sand nearby indicating possibly a more organized, high-level effort to harass Zainal. Displaying her resolve to continue campaigning, she said while standing next to the fallen billboard, "I am not discouraged. I will continue campaigning and hope to make it to parliament. This will be

a strong message that women will fight for their rights and cannot be stopped."

¶4. (SBU) COMMENTARY ON THE VANDALISM: Arabic daily Akhbar Al Khaleej editor-in-chief Anwar Abdulrahman wrote a front-page editorial condemning the destructive actions against the election campaigns of Al Ma'awada and Zainal, saying that such acts stain the "civilized face of Bahrain and the reputation of the people of Bahrain." He called on clerics to respect independent candidates even if they espouse views in conflict with those of Islamic candidates. Columnist Abdul Men'em Ebrahim called the vandals "corrupt and backward." Columnist Ali Sayyar wrote that the perpetrators of these acts cannot be "normal and healthy" but must be lacking in pride for their country.

¶5. (SBU) MUNICIPAL ELECTION REGISTRATION: Registration for candidates for the 40 municipal council seats concluded October 24 with a total of 171 candidates, among whom five are women. This number is down sharply from the 320 who registered for the 50 available seats in 2002, 34 of whom were women. (Note: The number of women in the parliamentary elections more than doubled this year to 18 candidates, up from eight in 2002. End note.) Of the five municipal council chairmen (one from each governorate) from last term, only the chairman in the predominantly Sunni Southern Governorate is running for reelection. The Central Governorate municipal council chairman died suddenly in September, so he was replaced by his deputy who has registered for reelection. Municipal election campaigns begin officially on October 28.

¶6. (SBU) CANDIDATE CODE OF CONDUCT: The Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS) will hold a public gathering

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October 26 to discuss a candidate code of ethics that it has prepared in conjunction with BTS parent organization Transparency International. BTS has encouraged all candidates to attend the gathering to discuss the document's content and invitation to voluntarily sign the code of conduct.

¶7. (C) In an October 26 meeting with Poloff, Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) assistant secretary general and spokesman Dr. Abdulla Al Derazi said that Al Minbar political society had contacted BTS to inform BTS officials that their candidates would not take part in any discussion or signing of a code of conduct. Al Derazi commented that BTS/BHRS had already documented election violations by Al Minbar candidates, including illegal placement of election posters and alleged payouts to voters by Al Minbar president Dr. Salah Ali, so it was unlikely that Al Minbar candidates would voluntarily open themselves to this kind of public accountability. (Note: Running against Ali is the strongest female candidate, who is supported by both Al Wifaq and Wa'ad political societies, Wa'ad member and University of Bahrain professor Munira Fakhro. End note.)

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The campaign tent vandalism does not fall into a clearly definable pattern. Whereas it could be natural to speculate that Islamists opposed to the involvement of women in the election might be responsible for damage to Fawzia Zainal's campaign tent and billboard, speculation about who might be behind the burning of Al Ma'awada's tent and the attempt on Khalid's tent is less intuitive. Although Zainal's resolve is strong, the perseverance of other female independent candidates may not be if they find themselves on the receiving end of such acts of vandalism.

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